

A Broken Christmas Vow

Over an elegantly appointed breakfast table a man on whose face lay the shadow of a great sorrow, and a sad-faced woman faced each other. Everything in the room bespoke wealth and luxury. The silent footed servant had retired and the two were alone.

The man nervously fingered his fork and seemed anxious to speak. The woman sat with folded hands silent. At last after a long silence the man spoke "Tomorrow," said he, "is Christmas Day and how are we going to spend it?"

The woman answered quickly as though expecting the question and had the answer ready. "We will spend it exactly as any other day; I have made up my mind to blot the day from the calendar. I will give no presents nor receive any." Her tone was hard and bitter, and the man gave a long sigh as he rose from the table.

"I thought," he said, in a hesitating tone, "we might have Will and Jennie and the children out to spend the day. Will's had it pretty rough this year. It would make things a little livelier."

The woman burst into tears. "Oh, John," she said, "how could you, how could you forget so soon. Only a year ago little Jack was with us, and we had the big tree, the rockinghorse, and drum, and toy engine and this year what have we—only a snow covered grave out in the cemetery. To see Will's children would only remind me of my own sorrow. I will stay in my own room tomorrow and see no one." Her husband gave no answer but left the room and soon she heard the front door close and knew he had left for the busy city where in the whirl of business he forgot his sorrow.

John Davis was spoken of in business circles as a very successful man. Although only in middle life he had amassed a large fortune. Late in life he had married a charming, cultured wife, and when a little son came he seemed to have everything in life one could wish for. Many looked at the couple with envious eyes; but as few pass through this life without some great sorrow so to them came a crushing sorrow when their 4-year-old was stricken with a fatal disease and two days after Christmas smiled a faint farewell and closed his baby eyes forever. Since then the beautiful home had been indeed a sad one, for Mrs. Davis refused to enter again the gay world but spent her time in mourning for her lost child.

After the conversation over the breakfast table Mrs. Davis retired to her room giving orders that no callers were to be admitted. Bitterness was in her heart as she thought of a year ago, scarcely had she seated herself when her maid entered and told her that a woman was below who begged to see her only for a moment. Reluctantly Mrs. Davis consented, but regretted it when she saw before her the matron of an Orphan Home for boys, to which she had always subscribed liberally. "Oh, Mrs. Davis," said the woman, "are you not going to give us something this year? Ever since we started the Home your gift at Christmas has always enabled us to give each boy a nice present and they have been so happy thinking about it this year."

"I am afraid you will have to do without my gift this year," said Mrs. Davis. "I have made a resolve to blot the day from my mind. How have I the heart to give to other boys when my boy was taken from me? No, I have lost all interest in the outside world; all I ask is

to be left alone with my sorrow."

While Mrs. Davis was speaking in her low, sad voice, the matron seemed changed into another woman. As she finished speaking the matron straightened her figure and speaking in a firm tone quite different from the one she had used in her first speech, she said, "Well, Mrs. Davis, as you are not going to give us anything I may as well speak plainly and tell you what I think. I think you are a selfish woman and had your boy lived he would no doubt have grown up to be a selfish man, good morning," and she turned and left the room.

Mrs. Davis stood rooted to the floor with the words ringing in her ears. "A selfish woman." She could hear the matron going slowly down the stairs. Each footfall seemed to echo the words. "A selfish woman." When she reached the last step Mrs. Davis could stand it no longer. Opening the door she called, "Come back, come back." The matron returned wondering, thinking Mrs. Davis angry at her speech, and was surprised to have handed her a larger check than she had ever received before. So unexpected was the gift that she tried in vain to thank her but Mrs. Davis silenced her gently and said, "Perhaps I have been selfish; I didn't think of it in that way."

She returned to her room but as she again took up her book she noticed that her maid, who was busy in the next room, seemed to be much in trouble. Her eyes were swollen as though she had been weeping and now and then she would give a long sigh. "What's the matter, Annie?"

"Nothing, ma'am; I'm always blue at Christmas," she said hurriedly, and left the room.

In vain Mrs. Davis tried to read her book but ever before her was the tear-stained face of her maid to whom she had grown much attached although but a simple country girl. Placing her book on the table she called another maid. "What is the matter with Annie?" she asked.

"She's homesick, ma'am," said the maid. "You know she's a widow with one little boy and she planned to go and spend Christmas with him."

"But why doesn't she go?" said Mrs. Davis. "I told you we would have a plain dinner and I am perfectly willing."

The girl twisted her apron in her fingers. "Well, ma'am, if you won't be cross at me saying it, it's this way: Annie took all her money she had saved up and sent him a big box of toys and things and you know you have always given us a little present and Annie was going to take that money and go home. Last night when you told us you were not going to give any presents Annie felt awful and this morning she's got a note from her boy saying he would be waiting for her. She's all broke up and I hope you ain't cross with me."

"No, I am not cross," said Mrs. Davis, as she took her book once more and turned to read. But now on every page was the round, rosy face of the little country boy waiting for his mother. Over and over she read the words of her book but seemed unable to understand them. "I am not going to break my promise to myself," she said. "I am not going to make any Christmas presents." "You have broken it once," said a voice within, "why not again?"

"It would almost appear as though I am going to be compelled to celebrate Christmas whether I wish to or not," said she, as she summoned Annie from the kitchen.

"Annie, I have decided to give you all your gifts as usual; here is yours and tell the rest they will have theirs tonight."

The girl's face was flooded with delight. "Oh, you don't know what this means to me; my little boy would have been so disappointed. Little pleasures mean so much to children, and I would rather disappoint the greatest man on earth than a little child."

"Well, your little boy will not be disappointed this year," said Mrs. Davis. "Now," she said to herself, "I will have no more interruptions, but will spend the rest of the day quietly. But now a new thought entered her brain to disturb her. What about Will's children. Never had she missed a Christmas to send them a box, and this year there would not be any. A sudden longing swept over her to see the children and with the first smile on her face that had been there for many months she said aloud:—"Twice have I broken my Christmas vow, so I might as well break it in earnest now." Hurrying into her fur coat she ordered her automobile and with the spirit of Christmas in her heart she drove to her husband's office.

John Davis was much surprised to see his wife enter the office.

"Why Mary, what brings you here?"

"Only a remark Annie made about disappointing children, John. I'll tell you all about it later on. Hurry to the market now and get some fruit and candy and anything you see. We are going to Will's to spend Christmas. They'll have the big turkey ready, so don't buy that."

From store to store Mrs. Davis hurried, spending her money generously. While she is busy selecting the toys let us for a moment glance at a different scene. In a big rambling farmhouse which had belonged to his father, lived John Davis' brother Will. He lacked the business ability of his brother, and many times found it difficult to make both ends meet. As he trudged home this Christmas Eve he thought what a fortunate man he was, for he knew the welcome that awaited him from his wife and three sturdy youngsters. But when he entered the large old-fashioned kitchen he noticed a cloud on the cheery face of his wife.

"What is the trouble, Jennie?"

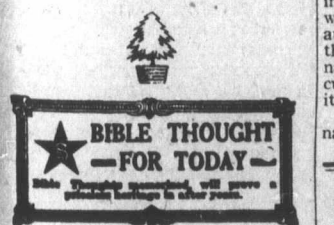
"Oh, I'll tell you when the children are in bed."

When the children were safely tucked away Jennie told her trouble. "Will, there's no box from John and his wife. Never a Christmas since the children came have they forgotten it and last year they promised Harry a toy engine, and nothing has come. This is the big tree and there hang the socks both empty. The little gifts I have for them are all serviceable and they will feel so badly."

Slowly her husband drew from his pocket a letter. "This," he said, "explains it."

"Dear Will,—Owing to our recent sorrow we are not making gifts this year. Please find enclosed a check which you can spend as you deem advisable. With the compliments of the season. Affectionately your brother, John. "And the village store is closed and Mr. Smith gone away to spend the Christmas," said his wife. "A lot of good that check will do," said Jennie. As they sat there wondering what to tell the children, they heard distant sleigh bells. The sound drew nearer and soon they heard a loud 'whoa' down by the barn. Will lighted a lantern and stood with it in the door just as his brother and his wife, laden with parcels came up the walk. No happier Christmas was ever spent than in that old kitchen when the two brothers, one a wealthy man of the world, and the other a farmer, sat by the big stove and recalled bygone days while their wives trimmed the tree and filled the stockings.

Just as the first grey streaks of dawn peeped under the blinds, Mrs. Davis heard the patter of little bare feet slowly going down stairs. She arose and wrapping a heavy dressing gown about her she leaned over the stairway and listened. What she heard was sufficient to make her reconciled to the fact that she had broken her Christmas vow.



DECEMBER 21 HOW TO GET ON.—Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find.—Matthew 7:7.

DECEMBER 22 WHITHERSOEVER.—God is with thee, whithersoever thou goest.—Joshua 1:9.

DECEMBER 23 CHOOSE YOUR ASSOCIATES.—Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness.—2 Corinthians 6:14.

DECEMBER 24 PLATFORM FOR LABOR AND CAPITAL.—All things whatsoever ye would that men do unto you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.—Matthew 7:12.

DECEMBER 25 WORLD'S BEST NEWS.—The angel said unto them. Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.—Luke 2:10, 11.

DECEMBER 26 GOD OVER ALL.—The eyes of all wait upon thee.—Psalms 145:15.

DECEMBER 27 HUMBLE YOURSELVES.—Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.—1 Peter 5: 6, 7.

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